

One of world's rarest plants discovered in Indiana

Short's goldenrod (Solidago shortii) turns up during inventory

There are approximately 25 species of goldenrod native to Indiana, ranging from the extremely common tall goldenrod, to the very rare stout-ragged goldenrod. None, however, are as rare as one recently discovered in southern Indiana.

In a cooperative project with The Nature Conservancy, ecologists with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Nature Preserves have been conducting a botanical and natural area inventory within the watershed of the Blue River in Harrison, Crawford and Washington counties.



In August Michael Homoya, Brian Abrell, and Amy Akin of the DNR were surveying areas bordering the Blue River within Harrison-Crawford State Forest and encountered a species of goldenrod that looked strangely familiar.

Familiar because not too many years earlier, in 1995, Mike and Brian had seen the goldenrod by participating in an effort to re-establish Short's goldenrod at the Falls of the Ohio State Park. The seven clumps planted at the Falls died within a year of planting because of flooding, but the memory of their appearance remained with the ecologists.

Their first reaction upon discovery of the goldenrod at the new site was cautious elation sprinkled with a dose of disbelief. But after careful inspection of the plants, and realization of the fact that the habitat was similar to that which once occurred at the Falls, they were satisfied that they had found one of the rarest plants on the globe.

The new Indiana site is one of only two known areas on earth to harbor wild populations of the goldenrod.

Short's goldenrod (*Solidago shortii*) is named after its discoverer, Dr. Charles Short of Louisville. He found it in 1840 growing on a limestone outcrop in Kentucky known as Rock Island, located within the Falls of the Ohio (River) between Clarksville, Ind. and Louisville.

Short's goldenrod was last collected from Rock Island in 1860, although it might still have been there until the Island was greatly altered by the construction of locks and dams at the Falls in the early 1900s.

It was considered extinct until the pre-eminent ecologist E. Lucy Braun found a population in 1939 in the Blue Lick Springs area of eastern Kentucky.

The two locations in Kentucky known to harbor Short's goldenrod were connected prior to 1800 by a buffalo trace, and it has been speculated that bison transported goldenrod seed from one locality to the other. Interestingly, the same buffalo trace extended into Indiana and crossed the Blue River.

Short's goldenrod is a federally listed endangered species, one of only two plant species with such status occurring in Indiana.